



STORAGE FAQ

Q What is DVD-RAM? Should I buy a DVD writer that supports it?

A DVD-RAM is a rewritable standard, so you can use the discs more than once and overwrite data. Unlike DVD+/-RW discs, DVD-RAM discs can be accessed like a hard disk, so you do not need DVD writing software such as Nero to write them, just a compatible drive.



Single-sided DVD-RAM discs can hold up to 4.7GB, while double-sided discs can hold up to 9.4GB. The discs used to come in caddy-style cartridges but these are now rare and incompatible with some newer writers.

DVD-RAM discs have certain advantages: they are rated to last as long as 30 years compared to around five to 10 years for DVD+/-RW; and can be written to 100,000 times, while DVD+/-RW discs can be rewritten only 1,000 times. However, the media is expensive at £5 a disc for DVD-RAM compared with just £1 for DVD+/-RW.

While DVD-RAM has advantages for backup use the low cost per gigabyte of hard disks makes a second disk an even better solution, and means there is little reason to seek out a DVD-RAM-compatible drive.

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REVIEW INTERNAL DVD WRITER

NEC ND-4550A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £39 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.techfever.co.uk

DETAILS www.nec.co.uk



The ND-4550A is the follow-up to NEC's 3540A (see Hotlist, below). Basic speeds remain the same, but the 4550A offers 5X DVD-RAM performance (see FAQ, left).

Despite the main specifications remaining the same, we noticed some speed improvements in our DVD+R and DVD+R DL tests; the 4550 took just over six minutes to write a full DVD+R, compared to six minutes and 30 seconds for the 3540.

The 4550 took 19 minutes and 33 seconds to write a full DVD+R DL, a full seven minutes faster than the 3540. Surprisingly, the 4550 was slower than the 3540 in our DVD-R test, taking just over six minutes to write a DVD-R while the 3540 took five minutes and 46 seconds.

Despite this, the 4550's great DVD+R DL performance makes it a good-value option for those who don't already own a DVD writer or have a slower writer. Owners of more recent drives, especially the 3540, will find little to tempt them.

Alan Lu

✓ Good DVD+R DL performance; cheap

✗ No software included; little reason to upgrade

SPECIFICATIONS 16X DVD-R, 16X DVD+R, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-R DL, 8X DVD+R DL, 48X CD-R, 32X CD-RW, 5X DVD-RAM.
Part code ND-4550A

REVIEW PORTABLE HARD DISK

BUFFALO MiniStation Shock Resistant Portable Hard Drive 40GB

RATING ★★★

PRICE £95 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.macwarehouse.co.uk

DETAILS www.buffalo-technology.com

Buffalo's MiniStation is shock resistant and can survive minor bumps as well as being dropped, although we wouldn't recommend doing this on purpose.

It performed respectably, but it's by no means the fastest portable hard disk we've seen. In our large files test, it wrote at 22.76MB/s and read at 25.33MB/s. In our small files test, it wrote at 8.25MB/s and read at 8.47MB/s.

The Secure LockWare encryption software, although fiddly, encrypts your data securely, but at the cost of speed; the MiniStation wrote encrypted data at 9.74MB/s and read at 6.10MB/s in our large files test. This is the sort of performance we would expect from a USB flash drive.

If you're looking for the best performance or the most storage for your money, the MiniStation will disappoint. But if you need to store your data securely, the MiniStation does the job.

Alan Lu



✓ Sturdy; lightweight; effective encryption software

✗ Sluggish performance with encryption; relatively expensive

SPECIFICATIONS 40GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed, USB powered.
Part code HD-PHS40U2/UC

HOTLIST DVD WRITER

NEC ND-3540A

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £31 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.girotech.co.uk

DETAILS www.nec.co.uk



Although it doesn't have support for DVD-RAM, NEC's ND-3540A is the fastest of the latest-generation DVD writers. Impressive writing specifications are backed up by excellent performance. It took only 19 minutes to fill a +R double-layer disc and just over 20 minutes to fill a -R dual-layer disc, which for these 8.5GB discs amounts to nearly ½GB/minute write speed. At this price, you won't find a faster writer.

SPECIFICATIONS 16X DVD+R, 16X DVD-R, 8X DVD+RW, 6X DVD-RW, 8X DVD+R DL, 6X DVD-R DL, 48X CD-R, 32X CD-RW, 16X DVD-ROM, 48X CD-ROM. Part code ND-3540A

HOTLIST PORTABLE HARD DISK

WESTERN DIGITAL Passport 80GB

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £98 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.dabs.com

DETAILS www.wdc.com



Western Digital's rubber-bottomed Passport is an excellent portable disk. It's a little bigger than a PDA and weighs just 238g, so it's easy to carry around. Inside is a 2½" hard disk that provides 80GB of storage. It connects via USB Hi-Speed and provides the kind of transfer speeds usual for such a disk; large files transfer at around 22MB/s and small files at 7MB/s. It's ideal as a second notebook hard disk or as portable file storage.

SPECIFICATIONS 80GB capacity, USB Hi-Speed interface, USB powered. Part code WDXML800UETE

HOTLIST INTERNAL HARD DISK

SAMSUNG SpinPoint SP2504C

RATING ★★★★★

PRICE £79 inc VAT

SUPPLIER www.komplett.co.uk

DETAILS www.samsung.com



Samsung's SpinPoint SP2504C was the best hard disk in our recent Labs test (*Shopper* September 2005). It combines good value with cutting-edge technology. Its 250GB of storage is accessed through a SATA II interface with Native Command Queuing at a maximum transfer rate of 300MB/s. If you're looking for more internal storage and you have a free SATA connector, this is the drive to buy.

SPECIFICATIONS 3½" internal hard disk, 250GB capacity, 232GB formatted capacity (NTFS), SATA 300 interface, 7200rpm spindle speed, 8MB cache. Part code SP2504C